



NIGHT OWL reporter

By ERNEST LEOGRANDE

The Video Stretch

Dancers move in a weirdly dimensioned room that never was, their bodies oozing into changing shapes as if they were being melted and reassembled. Suddenly, one of them leaps through space in a superhuman bound and is gone out of the picture.

This nonreality being projected through a color (naturally) television screen was made by another machine called a video synthesizer. The nature of man is to explore, otherwise we never would have gotten the wheel and the automobile and traffic accident statistics. New explorers are extending the limits of television with this new rarity, the synthesizer.

One night last month I sat on a stool in a lab in Union City, N.J., situated high on a bluff overlooking the lights of New York City, and watched a demonstration of programs made by videosynthesizers and this week I sat underground in a room a stone's throw from the UN and watched another.

It was like being made privy to the work of those mad scientists on the late-night movies except the people connected with these programs don't laugh fiendishly or go into mad rages in which they knock over smoking test tubes. They're eminently polite about their work even while telling the nontechnician not to try to understand it, just to sit back and enjoy it. An engineer, David Godfrey, pressed to explain, said, "We distort and blend and mix through amplifiers, multipliers, oscillators, summing amps, video deflection yokes, things like that." "Oh, I see," you could say although all you might see is on the screen in front of you.

At the Rutt Instrument Corp. in Union City, Bill Etra showed me some of his videosynthesizer-created movies. In one, "Dolphins," dolphin-like shapes swam across the screen in languidly choreographed formation. At Studio 46, downstairs at 345 E. 46th St., the dancers, real photo-



Charlotte Moorman will play TV cello on—where else?—TV.

graphed people swirling around and through the electronic architecture, were in a movie by Ed Emshwiller called "Scape-Mates." Effects can start with actual film or videotape but end results are electronically credited, usually in brilliant colors because they're pure colors rather than mixtures. Musical scores by audiosynthesizers often provide appropriate backgrounds.

If you've seen TV program announcements where a word suddenly is swooped up like pulled taffy and rearranged into another word, you've seen some idea of what a videosynthesizer can do just with the pushing of buttons.

Etra has been working with Steve Rutt of the Rutt Instruments Corp. in Union City developing the Rutt/Etra Synthesizer. He also is one of the resident artist-engineers at Studio 46, along with Emshwiller, Nam June Paik, Woody and Steina Vasulka, Bill Gwinn and David Silver, honored names all in the field of avant-garde movies and videotape.

Studio 46 has grants from the New York State Council on Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation to explore the uses of video. It's a year old, a laboratory for WNET, Channel 13 here, and Godfrey is the chief engineer. Two Channel 13 programs will give you a chance to see some of it for yourself. "The Television Show" 10:30 p.m. to midnight May 11 will include a potpourri: a look at the studio's videosynthesizer equipment in development, an analysis of the renewed popularity of "Star Trek," old Ernie Kovacs clips and a closed circuit nightly program from a housing project in Queens where the superintendent is the emcee.

"Global Groove," a half hour yet to be scheduled, uses videosynthesizer techniques to photograph live action under Paik's direction. There is a Korean woman dancer who uses drums and fans (the hand variety), two tap dancers from the show "Pippin" and that indomitable cellist Charlotte Moorman who has devoted herself to stretching the cello to its outer limits. Sometimes she has played topless, sometimes with instruments made of chocolate or melting ice. This time it will be a cello of television sets.

The videosynthesizer experimenters say the device may be used some day to create what they call "visual wallpaper," constantly moving abstract formations simply to be looked at. (Hey, fellows, some people have been turning down the sound and using it that way for years.)

If you have a true professional interest in the technicalities of videosynthesizers and have proper credentials, David Loxton and Diane English, who administer the work of Studio 46, say they can arrange a look around. Call 262-4990, 9 to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.